

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 043181
ORIGIN NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 043181

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINT, BG, US

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH

1. DURING A MEETING BETWEEN DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DUBS AND AMBASSADOR SIDDIQI ON FEBRUARY 16, WHICH WAS INITIATED FOR OTHER PURPOSES, THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH WAS DISCUSSED AT LENGTH. DUBS NOTED THAT WE ARE REQUIRED BY CONGRESS TO SUBMIT HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS ON 105 COUNTRIES. WE ARE PLEASED THAT WE COULD REPORT A GENERAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SCENE IN BANGLADESH, ESPECIALLY THE RELEASE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. WHEN THE REPORT WAS DRAFTED, WE KNEW OF 37 EXECUTIONS WHICH FOLLOWED THE OCTOBER MILITARY MUTINY AND SO REPORTED. HOWEVER, ON THE BASIS OF MORE RECENT INFORMATION, WE WILL BE OBLIGATED IN THE FUTURE TO REPORT THE NUMBER AS BEING OVER 200.

2. DUBS SAID, AS FRIENDS, WE CONTINUE TO SHARE WITH
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PAGE 02 STATE 043181

BANGLADESH A CONCERN FOR ITS INTERNATIONAL IMAGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS. IN THE FUTURE, WE WILL DOUBTLESS BE PRESSED FOR INFORMATION ON THE EXECUTIONS. WE WOULD THUS APPRECIATE AS MUCH INFORMATION ON THEM AS THE BDG COULD PROVIDE, IN PARTICULAR ON THE LEGAL PROCEDURES UNDER WHICH THE MUTINEERS WERE SENTENCED, AS WELL AS ON THE NUMBER OF THOSE EXECUTED.

WE APPRECIATE THE FRANK AND OPEN EXCHANGES WE HAVE HAD WITH THE BDG IN THE PAST AND WE HOPE IT CAN CONTINUE TO PROVIDE BACKGROUND INFORMATION. AS THE BDG IS AWARE, WE ARE OBLIGED BY LAW TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ANY COUNTRY RECEIVING ASSISTANCE. WHILE WE DO NOT IN ANY WAY MEAN TO THREATEN THE BANGLADESHIS, WE ARE OBLIGED TO NOTE THAT IN THE FUTURE IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR US TO ACCEPT ANY PATTERN OF GROSS AND CONSISTENT VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH.

3. SIDDIQI REPLIED THAT THE BDG HAS NO COMPLAINT ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT WHICH IT FINDS FACTUAL, OBJECTIVE AND FAIR. HOWEVER, IT IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE RECENT SPATE OF PRESS ARTICLES REPORTING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH. THESE UNFAIRLY SEEM TO SINGLE OUT BANGLADESH AS A HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM COUNTRY WHEN, COMPARED WITH MANY OTHERS, THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BANGLADESH IS FAIRLY GOOD.

4. THE AMBASSADOR PROMISED THAT HE WILL TRY TO PROVIDE THE INFORMATION ON THE EXECUTIONS WHICH DUBS REQUESTED. SIDDIQI HAS DISCUSSED THE HUMAN RIGHTS ASPECTS OF THE EXECUTIONS WITH PRESIDENT ZIA WHO IS SOMEWHAT PERPLEXED ABOUT THE LEVEL OF FOREIGN INTEREST. THIS IS BECAUSE NO CIVILIANS WERE INVOLVED. THE MUTINEERS WHO WERE PUNISHED WERE ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL, SOME OF WHOM WERE ACCORDED THE TRADITIONAL MILITARY PENALTY HANDED DOWN FOR MUTINY. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 043181

UNDER MARTIAL LAW CIVILIANS ARE ALLOWED THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE EXERCISE OF THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS. FOR EXAMPLE, A HIGH RANKING OFFICIAL OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAS JUST BEEN RELEASED FROM CONFINEMENT AFTER A CIVILIAN REVIEW OF A MILITARY TRIBUNAL SENTENCE.

5. DUBS AGAIN STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE WHICH WE PLACE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND OUR INTEREST IN KNOWING AS MUCH AS WE CAN ABOUT THE SITUATION IN BANGLADESH. BANGLADESHI OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD US THAT ABOUT 1200 PRISONERS ARE STILL HELD WITHOUT TRIAL. DO THE PRISONERS KNOW THE CHARGES AGAINST THEM? DO THEY HAVE ACCESS TO THE COURTS? IS ANY PROGRESS BEING MADE TOWARD REVIEWING THEIR CASES? SIDDIQI NOTED THAT PRESIDENT ZIA PLANS TO CALL FOR ELECTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND IS AWARE OF THE POSITIVE POLITICAL IMPACT WHICH RELEASED POLITICAL PRISONERS CAN HAVE. HE AGAIN STRESSED HIS GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO BE AS COOPERATIVE AS POSSIBLE. VANCE

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